

The Good News and Joy of Our Way Forward
Texas CFCFFL Assembly (North and South Houston), September 22-23, 2007
CFCFFL Mid-Atlantic Cluster Assembly, September 28, 2007
Texas CFCFFL Assembly (Dallas), October 7, 2007
by Ado Paglinawan
CFCFFL Regional Coordinator for the Mid-Atlantic USA

We are moving out of lamentation and onto restoration.

To do that, we must be first go back to basics. Most appropriate, is reviewing our covenant and rededicating ourselves to Christ.

I have suggested a few pointers out of many things around us we take for granted but when adapted creatively to our culture, will greatly empower our witness to the world. These activities are intended to blend with our CFC culture and enhance our FFL charism.

The three denominators are: first, Christ and family centered; second emphatic on building relationships and third, evangelistic and parish-involved.

1. **I shall live as a follower of Christ.**

Am I growing in holiness in my everyday life? Is my prayer a search for God? Do others see Christ in my thoughts, words and actions? Do I seek God's good news and point of view first and foremost more than others?

Theme for October: The Church of Christ

We are a people called to holiness. Be holy for I am holy, says the Lord. Deepening in our relationship with Jesus is taking seriously our prayer time and our attitudes towards Scriptures, the Sacraments and Mary. CFC does not replace our Catholicism, we are the church.

1.1 We admonish everyone to start his move for restoration with the **Sacrament of Reconciliation** and of course weekly with the **Sacrament of the Holy Eucharist**.

1.2 We encourage all on a best effort-basis to **Daily Eucharist**. This of course difficult especially those who are gainfully employed, but can you imagine the grace that will flow to all of us through those few who will be able to observe this?

1.3 To support the Eucharist, we constructed a website www.cfcffl.com containing

1.3.1 the **readings for Daily Mass** courtesy of the *United States Conference of Catholic Bishops* link.

1.3.2 the *Household Leader Newsletter* which features **reflections for the daily readings**, published on a weekly basis. Old versions are archived for back referencing.

1.4 October is the month of the Most Holy Rosary, and October 13 is 90th anniversary of Our Lady's apparition at Fatima, she of course is the first Christian and thus the Star of Evangelization. Bro. Butch and Sis. Melinda Paredes will go to Portugal with their family to deliver our intentions to the foot of Our Lady.

To celebrate the mysteries of Christ's joyful coming, sorrowful sufferings and glorious kingship through Mary, we have expressed solidarity with **Beads for Peace** and organized a **Rosary Chain** to celebrate it for the whole month of October.

All CFCFFL members are required to say the rosary daily for an entire month in their respective homes and with their families. A leader is designated for each day, and the whole community prays for the intention of that family for that day including the general intentions of our community in the area and CFCFFL worldwide.

1.5 October 21 is World Mission Sunday. This is also the formal launch of our **African Begging Bowl**, highlighting fundraising activities for the second Cameroon Mission from December 26, 2007 to January 9, 2008.

1.5.1 This trip is intended firstly to serve as a follow-up to the 314 individuals who took the CLP last November 2006, and to dedicate about another hundred that they enrolled in a CLP they have conducted themselves. The follow-up will constitute Covenant Orientation, a talk on Financial Stewardship.

1.5.2 The Buea Diocese has also organized a CFC Youth Camp for at least 1,000 young adults from December 26 to 29. For this project, we need at least ten CFCY leaders to train at least 100 local CFCY discussion heads.

We are sounding off early because air transportation of the mission alone is \$25,000 already, so the financial picture is quite a challenge by itself. Remember, your offering to the Cameroon begging bowl is over and above your tithe obligations.

1.6 We have also organized in Virginia Beach for October 26 to 28, a retreat that Couples for Christ has in its manual but has been long forgotten. This is the **Joy of Discovery in Bible Study** based on the universally-accepted book of Oletta Wald.

When our recent crisis unfolded, many emails were crossing the internet faster than the speed of a bullet. A lot of them were quoting Scriptures. The most classic was a broadcast posting of a CFCUSA council member who was removed from office. Obviously spewing with sour grapes, the poor man used some scriptural verses questioning his removal, showing disrespect to his elder, and subtly conveying his disobedience in no uncertain terms.

The Catholic Church frowns on *sola scriptura* in the use of the Holy Bible as even the devil tempted Jesus three times using Scriptures. Joy of Discovery will introduce Catholic *exegesis* to our leadership, a step-by-step method of observing, interpreting, summarizing, evaluating, applying and finally actualizing Scriptures to our everyday lives.

2. I dedicate myself in building a strong family for Christ.

Have we enthroned Jesus as the center of our family life? Have we as a family learned greater loving, caring and sharing for one another? Do we value the CFC Family Ministries and do we support it fully?

Theme for November : The Church of the Home

- 2.1 This month starts with a scandal that is widely celebrated even in the Christendom – the Halloween, or what I call the feastday of Satan. Traditional activities include [trick-or-treating](#), [costume parties](#), viewing [horror films](#), visiting "[haunted houses](#)", and participating in traditional [autumn](#) activities such as [hayrides](#). Halloween originated as a Pagan festival among the Celts of Ireland and Great Britain. The holiday has been embraced as a part of American pop culture since the late twentieth century.
 - 2.1.1 And so we will join the fun, but not as Halloween but **Halleluyah!** to celebrate **All Saints Day**. Instead of dressing ourselves and our children as ghosts, goblins or ghouls, we shall take on costumes of the holy angels and saints. Instead of sheer trick-or-treating, we will retain the candies and the goodies but put them in a small brown bag where we call also insert calling cards printed from our website using appropriate biblical quotations. These bags will await those who knock on our doors, and also disseminated to the our neighbors homes as we visit them. And of course, we will pray before we send off the children and after they come home.
 - 2.1.2 Do not forget also to go to Holy Eucharist on November first. It is **holiday of obligation**.
- 2.2 Because of Halloween, we also encourage those who have not yet have house blessings to invite a priest within the month to have one. We also call for the **Enthronement of the Sacred Heart of Jesus** in our homes. But in doing this, do not just go through the motions without informing and involving all members of your family.
 - 2.2.1 Preparatory to the enthronement, make it an opportunity to have a **One-on-One** with your spouse, sons and daughters, and make that the start of a monthly practice.
 - 2.2.2 Take occasion also to **Repairing Relationships** with any member of the family that you have not been in good terms or not-seeing-to-eye or have resentments with. Remember, broken relationship blocks the transference of grace between and among God's people. The bible says "do not let the sun set on your wrath".
- 2.3 What fitting event to cap this month in celebrating your family with the **Thanksgiving Night**. But do not let football dominate the day. Make it a blessed and historic family day. The first Thanksgiving prayer was held in the Virginia Colony on December 4, 1619 but it was the experience of the early settlers of Plymouth Colony in Massachusetts (who came to be called "Pilgrims") that we ought to observe. The pilgrims set apart a holiday immediately after their first harvest in 1621, when they held an autumn celebration of food, feasting, and praising God. Today, modern Thanksgiving in the United States is celebrated on the fourth Thursday in November.

3. I will relate in love and loyalty to other families in Couples for Christ.

Have I become more selfless and loyal to my brethren in CFC? Have I become more humble as I continue to serve the community? Is my life bearing the fruit of the Holy Spirit? Have I

been truly caring to other brothers and sisters, or are our relationships functional?

Theme for December: The Church in Fellowship

Know that the Lord is a God of relationships. Be always aware of building up the body and, whenever violated, correcting/repairing wrongdoings. Our hallmark teaching is Matthew 18, 15ff, and as Christians we don't just apologize, we ask and give forgiveness.

- 3.1 Between Thanksgiving and the first day of December which is a Saturday, you can start by involving your own family in the hanging the Christmas lantern (*Parol*), putting up the Nativity set (*Belen*) under the pine tree, and installing the dizzying lights to advertise to your neighbors that you are in celebration.
- 3.2 The day after that, set up **Advent Wreath**, a Christian tradition that started in the Middle Ages. This year make the heated discussion among your children not about which video games they want for Christmas but whose turn it is to light one of the five candles on the wreath. The first candle will be lit on December 2, the first Sunday of the Advent season. More details related to the Advent Wreath will be announced in the CFCFFL.com website before Thanksgiving Day.
- 3.3 Organize early for **Caroling** for the missions and the **Christmas Party** for the community. Make these an occasion for inviting people to a Christian Life Program. In this connection, please bear in mind that when buying gifts this Christmas, avoid a splurge because being in community you have missions and the social ministries to support.
- 3.4 Remember, the **Novena Mass** (*Simbang Gabi*) begins on the evening of December 15 (vigil) or the early dawn of December 16, depending on where you are. This year, CFCFFL in MD-VA-DC will actively support the Simbang Gabi project in those states.
- 3.5 There will also be a **Novena of the Holy Spirit Prayers for the Cameroon Mission** starting December 22 and culminating on December 30, the feast of the most Holy Family celebrated on the last Sunday of December. Format of the novena will be announced in the www.cfcffl.com website.

4. I will make myself available to the Lord in service.

Have I done my part in evangelization, bringing others closer to Jesus, bringing new members to the community? How many couples/individuals did I bring to the community last year? How has my service to God and community renewed my life?

Theme for January: The Church for Others

If you may, you can also call the theme for this month "*The Church for Evangelization*" or "*The Church for Service*". We are men and women for others. Serve the Lord of the service, rather the service to the Lord. Know how you are part and parcel of CFC's global, massive and rapid evangelization.

What do we do best in January? The answer is the **Evangelization Rally**.

4.1 How many **Christian Life Programs** will you slate for next year?

4.1.1 Are you going to consider inviting to the theBlacks and the Hispanics to our CLP?

Local statistics in our area have been staggering. In Baltimore, 70% of the Blacks are not married. It was only after I went to Africa that I found out where this was coming from. The effect of Islam and indigenous religion on Africa has made the men overly promiscuous, so much that most African countries bear the consequences of many single mothers most of whom do everything from cottage industries top agriculture just to for eke food for herself and her children. Of course here there is welfare but there, there can only be hunger and malnutrition. This problem goes beyond testosterone issues, however, and touches on unmitigated anti-life practices, not just for the unborn but for everyone as in HIV-AIDS, and high mortality rates. In Washington DC, a cosmopolitan city, one out of 20 Blacks are HIV positive. In the African continent, one fourth of entire populations have AIDS.

Do not start with in-country home grown Afro-Americans. Start with the Black and Hispanic emigres, in their homesickness they are the best candidates for a CLP, either for Couples for Christ or *Matrimonios para Cristos*.

We have not scheduled it yet. But as we speak, we already have 30 sign-ups for a Cameroonian CLP, not in Africa but right in our neck of woods in Burtonsville, MD. I found where they celebrate their ethnic Mass once every month. Because of their inclusion in my network, I have also found where the Ethiopians, the Ugandan and the Kenyans worship in our Archdiocese of Washington. In the Diocese of Arlington, we have also found where the Hispanics go to Sunday Church and we have assigned some point persons to start the connections.

4.2 To put fire in your evangelization, I would also recommend that you consider conducting your own Joy of Discovery in Bible Study weekend retreat. I will be willing to return here to conduct the retreat for you in January.

4.3 Would you also consider **Christian Men and Women's Breakfasts** to expand our horizons especially in support of our social ministries? There are many who do not have service and yet our community is so full of leaders. With the one-service rule that was promulgated last year, a weekly breakfast can be such fun. I started in the Catholic renewal not for couples but for evangelizing business and social leaders using the Christian men's breakfast as a strategic tool.

5. I will study and seek to grow as a Christian person.

Our task as a Christian coincides with CFCFFL's vision and mission summarized in Luke 4: 18 which in the New American Bible reads as bringing glad tidings to the poor. Parallel versions, however, pin it down to as preaching the gospel to the poor. The problem is most confine their understanding of the word "poor" to what it literally means.

Theme for the February: The Church of the Poor.

Who are the “poor in the biblical context? The best commentaries I have read are from *John W. Ritenbaugh* and *Matthew Henry*. Ritenbaugh says: “The word ‘poor’ does not necessarily mean that a person is in absolute, abject poverty. It can mean only that the person is weak or powerless. Jesus says He is going to free them from poverty or weakness. If we look at this in a spiritual sense, it applies to every one of us. We all have been spiritually powerless.”

Henry adds: “those that were *poor in the world* whom the Jewish doctors disdained to undertake the teaching of and spoke of with contempt; to those that were *poor in spirit*, to the meek and humble, and to those that were truly sorrowful for sin - to them the gospel and the grace of it will be welcome, and they shall have it.

- 5.1 The first poor that we should minister is **ourselves**. Our covenant has these questions: Have I attended all required teachings and have I tried my best to live them out? Have I grown in maturity as a disciple of Christ? Have I grown in financial stewardship, making more of my resources available for the Lord’s service? Finally, how can I grow and excel as a true Christian witness?
- 5.2 Our intercession are needed more to empower our community in the **spiritual warfare** that we are engaged. When the bible says *pray unceasingly*, it is dead serious about being sensitive to those around us aching to be ministered. I have [angelspraying4u<angelicfb@gmail.com>](mailto:angelspraying4u@gmail.com) Just an email away for people we want to lift up in prayer.
- 5.3 Publicly, we can actively engage in the parish and diocesan life, so that with other Christians we can involve numbers in say **Pro-life advocacy**. We in CFCFFL have adopted the Joseph, Mary and Jesus as our template of a holy family. Ever since paradise, the family has always been father and mother, man and woman in Adam and Eve, and not Adam and Steve as some states around us want to promulgate. Our presence in the parish and diocesan activities gives electricity to our witness. And while we are at this, maybe we task one of our chapters to organize continuing teachings pertaining to the **Theology of the Body** of Pope John Paul II starting February.
- 5.4 The next are those around us deserving of corporal as well spiritual works of mercy. Our **social ministries and Gawad Kalinga** are just aching to be integrated by us. They don’t have to be formal ministries, our families can visit the aging in their homes, prisoners behind bars, and the sick. If our time would not allow this, then we could use our talents or treasures to reach them.
- 5.5 Then lastly for February, don’t just organize a **Valentine’s Party** for merriment and ballroom dancing. Make it a fundraising for a good cause.

I hope these recommended forward motion will start the momentum to enrich what you are already doing for Couples for Christ on a chapter level, the pastoral level at which each CFC chapter actually is a mini-CFC. A chapter full of life and mission for Christ is the best thing that can happen to CFCFFL.

Let us not be distracted by the present crisis from the principle that Christianity is all about personal relationships, i.e. with Christ and with one another. In basic catechism, we have been taught that we have been created by God to know, love and serve him. This was true in Eden, this is true today. God created us to share in his life, to be in union with him. From the wrong choice of our first parents,

however, we inherited our inclination for self-life, a life separate from God.

When we took the CLP, all of this changed as we made an adult decision to take our road to restoration. We have committed to Christ to turn away from our self-propelled past apart from God and start a new life in faith onto the Father. That was what our covenant was all about.

But somewhere along the way, we again lost focus.

The haste at which corporate CFC commissioned us to service has definitely overlooked certain key linchpins. That service ought to flow from our love for God, in and through Christ, and onto one another. The trouble is we kind of assumed that was automatic, and now we are torn between our love for God and our love for brethren, with our preoccupation with funding humanitarian programs.

Charles Swindoll in his book *Killing Giants and Pulling Thorns* has this to say: “Busyness rapes relationships. It substitutes shallow frenzy for deep friendship. It promises satisfying dreams, but delivers hollow nightmares. It feeds the ego, but starves the inner man. It fills the calendar but fractures the family. It cultivates a program but plows under priorities.”

Bishop Gabriel Reyes hit the nail on its head when he quoted Tony Meloto’s published statement in the Philippines Daily Inquirer to point where the very bonnie of contention is in the CFC split: “GK is non-partisan. We do not take any sides in building a nation in the same manner that we do not pass judgment on any corporation that we engage. We do not even ask them what their (corporations) products are as long as they want to help.”

Well CFCFFL does not agree. **Couples for Christ is partisan. We are covenanted to Jesus Christ. We are Christians following the Roman Catholic tradition.** Thus we take sides in doctrinal and moral issues. We do not allow others to impose upon our conscience. In fact, we ask only those, who in their free and unencumbered conscience are willing, to join us.

We do not expose our character as Christians to possible compromise with the world, the flesh and the devil. We flee from temptation and all occasions of sin. We zealously guard our faith from false teachers. We do not depart from the spiritual just to excel in social and secular achievements. Our emphasis is not in nation-building but restoring nations to God. We do not engage in charity without Christ. Benedict XVI precisely cautions us against straying away – “what good is social development.” he said, “if we are illiterate about God?”

The good news is that we know our bearing and our ultimate destination – **Christ yesterday, today and forever!** We do not serve God and mammon. Our bottomline is not money for the poor but Christ. We must know him not just from the groaning of our spirits for a supreme being or savior, but from who he says he is, that is from his Word.

When this happens we become fully restored to God’s plan and bear fruits. That is why our joy becomes complete.

In the 15th chapter of the gospel of John it is written: “7 **If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask for whatever you want and it will be done for you.** [*Faithfulness empowers us.*] 8 By this is my Father glorified, that you bear much fruit and become my disciples. [*This is when our mission becomes a matter of numbers, not earlier.*] 9 As the Father loves me, so I also love you. Remain in my love. [*Father loves the Son who loves us in turn. Through the Holy Spirit, we then love others and so forth such that the numbers becomes rapid, and massive.*] 10 If you keep my commandments, you

will remain in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commandments and remain in his love. [*Obedience is key. That is why when we fall we must find our way back soonest.*] 11 I have told you this **so that my joy may be in you and your joy may be complete.**” (John 15, 7-11)

At this juncture, I urge everyone to forget what lies behind, especially resentments and broken relationships, and strain forward to what lies ahead (Philippians 3, 13b) that is exercising our respective charism and performing service to upbuild the body of Christ. Romans 12, 11-12 exhorts us, “Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervor, serving the Lord. Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer.”

Brothers and sisters, there are many concerns that discovering the word of God and claiming the joy that it brings, will address. It will heal relationships as it tames our hearts and conforms our mind to Christ who is the cornerstone of our life in community.

As we move forward, let us adopt the attitude of Peter - “*Above all, let your love be intense...be hospitable to one another as good stewards of God’s varied grace. Whoever preaches, let is be with the words of God; whoever serves, let is be with the strength that God supplies, so that in all things God may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom belong glory and dominion forever and ever.*” (1 Peter 4, 7-11)

Exciting times are ahead. Our train has already left the terminal and will soon be at your station. Have you bought your tickets already? Come aboard and we will soon be cruising towards a more meaningful, more rapid and massive evangelization like no eyes has seen before as “our joy becomes complete” in God’s kingdom on earth as it is in heaven. Amen.